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ABSTRACT

Peer tutoring has a long historical precedent in western civilization. Since its reemergence in the United States during the 1960s, it has been used for every age group, subject matter, and level of intelligence. Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of peer tutoring, its efficacy in the college writing center has caught the attention of leaders in the field of English education, and it is most eloquently supported in K. Bruffee's "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" Peer tutors are effective in helping students with the different stages of the writing process, but that effectiveness depends primarily on the type of training tutors receive. The most emulated college program was formulated by Bruffee at Brooklyn College, and emphasizes peer criticism. Like any other technique that promises fast action and quick results, peer tutoring should be scrutinized seriously. Tutors could be rated by observers using a performance checklist, or, for a more summative evaluation, a pretest and posttest could be given to the student to determine improvements as a result of the tutoring. (HTH)

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Peer Tutoring and the Teaching of Writing

Mary P. Deming

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Peer Tutoring and the Teaching of Writing

Numerous methodologies have emerged in the field of education throughout the centuries, all vying to meet the unique and diverse needs of students. These methodologies have swung far and wide, conservative and liberal, spanning a range of activities from lone, respected professors spewing precious pearls of wisdom to cozy, carpeted freewheeling open classrooms. In this chain of educational history, one method of instruction keeps reemerging, namely, that of peer tutoring. "Peer tutoring refers to the concept of students teaching other students in formal or informal learning situations that are delegated, planned, or directed by the teacher" (Wagner, 1982, p. 5).

If one would randomly open the pages of the history of education, one would discover instances of peer tutoring in its various guises, in every country of the Western World during every historical era. During the Greek and Roman days, for example, even Aristotle utilized peer tutoring to meet the needs of his many students who were preparing for responsible citizenship in the Greek state. Peer tutoring, abandoned by the Catholic Church since the Middle Ages, was reinstated by the Jesuits during the Counter-Reformation to repress heresy and to help reform the abuses found in the Church. Peer tutoring was also practiced in secular education throughout history, too, as evidenced by its

presence at Eton College in England as early as 1440. The French employed this method during the 17th century, and England was the birthplace of Joseph Lancaster's famous monitorial system. In this system, a master instructed monitors, who, in turn, drilled their fellow students in various subjects. This method became popular worldwide and was transported to America in the 19th century. In America, the most famous use of peer tutoring was in the rural one-room schoolhouse. Here, teachers

> often called upon their older students to help teach the younger ones. They did so in the hope that the younger children would benefit from the extra attention they got from their tutors, and that the older ones, proud to be cast as assistant teachers, would be motivated to improve their own school work. (Wagner, 1982, p. 215)

During the first half of the 20th century, peer tutoring appears to have lost its popularity in America. Not until the 1960s did this technique reappear. Since then, it has been utilized for every age group, subject matter, and level of intelligence. All over the country, one can find kindergarten students tutoring each other in alphabet skills, or beginning Spanish students drilling each other in vocabulary, or advanced medical students testing each other's diagnostic judgments (Bruffee,1978). Coupled with renewed enthusiasm for peer

tutoring came both descriptive and experimental research investigating this technique's efficiency. Numerous research studies were conducted during the 1960s and 1970s concerning the benefits of peer tutoring, the types of peer tutoring, the kinds of students who seek tutoring, and the rewards for the tutors themselves (North, 1984).

Johnson and Johnson (1975) have reviewed the literature and have provided excellent summaries of the advantages of peer tutoring:

1. Peer tutoring is effective in teaching children who do not respond well to adults.
2. Peer tutoring can develop a deep bond of friendship between the tutor and the person being helped; the result of which is very important for integrating slow learners into the group.
3. Peer tutoring takes the pressure off the teacher by allowing her to teach a large group of students; at the same time, it allows the slow learners the individual attention they need.
4. The tutors benefit by learning to teach, a general skill that can be very useful in an adult society.
5. Peer tutoring happens spontaneously under cooperative conditions, so the teacher does not have to organize and manage it in a formal, continuing way. (p. 37)

In 1978, Buckholdt and Wodarski also commented on the value of peer tutoring:

1. Peer tutoring can reduce anxiety caused by vast differences in age, status, and background between students and teachers. A peer tutor may possible communicate more easily with a student.
2. More individualized instruction is possible.
3. The tutor may increase his own understanding of a subject, as well as his self-esteem and self-confidence.
4. Additional motivation for learning may come through peer tutoring.
5. Peer tutors might be more patient with a slow learner.
6. Peer tutoring reinforces previous learning, may reorganize knowledge more effectively and increase understanding. (pp. 50-51)

In the field of language arts, peer tutoring has found both success and popularity. This strategy has been employed primarily for the teaching of reading on the elementary school level and in the teaching of composition in high schools and colleges. In particular, during the 1960s and 1970s, writing centers using peer tutors have been established in record numbers on university and college campuses. Presently, writing centers are part of the status quo in higher education, and research and discussion are

being carried on through conferences, journals, and professional dialogues.

Peer tutoring and writing centers have caught the attention of leaders in the field of English education. Many experts have commented on this method's efficacy on the college level and have encouraged other educators to capture this powerful educational tool. Moffett (cited in Gebhardt, 1980) suggests that peer tutoring is effective because it provides a real audience for student writing and offers a chance for dialogue between the writer and tutor. Gebhardt concurs by stating that peer tutoring provides a sense of audience and also, importantly, harnesses the strong psychological power of peer influence. He further notes that the tutors themselves gain insights into their own writing as they comment on the writings of others.

Loretta Cobb (1984) summarizes the opinions of prestigious college and university writing center directors in her article "Undergraduate Staffing in the Writing Center." She quotes the eminent Muriel Harris as describing peer tutors as "almost unexplored goldmines" (p. 123) and shares Paula Beck's thoughts that "tutors change the learning environment because they are likely to share the ideas and experiences of the tutees" (p. 124). Thom Hawkins, writing center director at the University of California, is cited: "Tutors are both 'insiders and outsiders'

who can provide a vital-writer audience link, often missing when students write only for teachers" (p. 125).

Hawkins (1980) elaborates on the vital writer-audience link in peer tutoring in his article entitled "Intimacy and Audience: The Relationship between Revision and the Social Dimension of Peer Tutoring." As writing center director at Berkeley, he requires his peer tutors to maintain journals reflecting on their tutoring experiences. From reading these journals, over 100 of them through the years, he concludes that his tutors become quickly concerned with their tutees' welfare and, in particular, the tutors want their students to be successful with the language of academia. So, tutoring sessions then become avenues for practicing the university-required academic discourse or register, without the embarrassment that occurs when making mistakes in a formal classroom.

Peer tutors, besides providing a friendly and safe audience, also share the same undergraduate experience as their tutees. Close in age to their tutees, these tutors represent equals who have already mastered a skill that the tutee still needs to learn. Consequently, the peer tutor-tutee relationship is a friendly, supportive, non-hostile one.

The greatest supporter of peer tutoring is the founding father of the famous Brooklyn College Writing Center, Kenneth Bruffee. In the 1970s, when he was teaching English to the

college's first open-admission students, he noticed that they learned to write better when they were helping each other, rather than working alone or with a teacher. Hence, he opened a drop-in storefront writing center to serve the college's 35,000 students and manned it with peer tutors (cited in Dugger, 1976).

Underlying Bruffee's writing center and peer tutoring is the theory of collaborative learning. In other words, students learn better when they work together. "Peer tutoring is a way of involving students in each other's intellectual, academic and social lives; an involvement which can benefit both tutors and their students" (Bruffee, 1978, p. 448).

Even though peer tutoring has proven successful in the past, most teachers, at best, are skeptical of collaborative learning, contends Bruffee. Classrooms in which the teacher is the authoritative dispenser of knowledge do not lend themselves to collaborative learning and often teachers of this sort view peer tutoring as plagiarism (1973). Critics should remember their own childhoods, when friends, rather than teachers, taught them new skills. Thus, there are many ways of acquiring or discovering knowledge, and collaborative learning, Bruffee believes, is a most effective way.

Writing and collaborative learning work well together, Bruffee maintains. Learning to write differs from other types of

learning because students are using skills and techniques that they have been using every day of their lives. Rather than learning new skills, writers need to become more aware of language and its possibilities. This "awareness process" may be painful, and consequently, writers need the support of an understanding and nurturing group of peers. Peer tutors, after establishing their authenticity, become members of a more demanding and astute audience, who demand clarity and logic in each other's writing. At the same time, they can hone their own writing and editing skills (Bruffee, 1973).

The most eloquent argument for the use of peer tutoring for the teaching of composition on the college level is offered also by Bruffee in his "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" (1984). In this lengthy philosophical, almost poetic piece, he argues that all of mankind is involved in a continuous conversation in which all members commune with each other and within themselves. Conversation that takes place within a person is defined as reflective thought, and this thought is related to conversation, both organically and functionally. Reflective thought is related to conversation organically because thought first originates in conversation, whether spoken or alone, and is then internalized. Thus people learn to think reflectively by learning to talk reflectively with other people.

By forming communities which foster reflective thought and allow opportunities for thinking, people will learn to write better. In fact, writing is internalized conversation re-externalized. In a peer tutoring situation, students can converse seriously, internalize their conversations (reflective thought), and then re-externalize their thoughts in writing. Peer tutors should, therefore, engage their tutees in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible, and should try to structure the talking to imitate the desired final written product.

Another rationale for peer tutoring offered in this article is that this type of teaching allows for the mode of writing titled "normal discourse." "Normal discourse applies to conversation within a community of knowledgeable peers" (Bruffee, 1984, p. 8). In normal discourse, the community of peers, whether they are members of an academic, a business or government community, all agree to the conventions appropriate to their fields. This is the type of practical writing most college curriculums hope to teach their students. The real value of peer tutoring is that it provides a common social context necessary for writing normal discourse. This context is a community of knowledgeable peers. The writer, then, must have experience in using the tools of communication demanded by his classmates, just as he must oblige the language rules of his medical, business, or legal career when he finishes college.

To develop his third major premise supporting peer tutoring, Bruffee recalls Thomas Kuhn's theory that knowledge is "indeterminate and that there is no fixed point of reference in which to measure truth" (1984, p. 11). In addition, knowledge must then be made by each individual, and that knowledge is what any person says it is. Knowledge is made by communities of peers, and peer tutoring allows students to make knowledge and to contribute to the knowledge of others. Returning to the conversation of mankind concept, Bruffee believes that peer tutoring allows students to enter into the area of conversation and to create knowledge from this communication.

Bannister-Wills (1984) concurs with Bruffee's thinking and notes that present models of composition are process-based rather than product-based. Research in the 1960s and 1970s has shown that writing is a process involving three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Good writers proceed through all three stages and spring back and forth through each stage, gaining insight along the way. Hence, the emphasis in writing instruction is not the writing of a perfect product--a finished paper--but instead is the working through of all three stages of composing.

Peer tutors are effective in helping students with the different stages of writing. During the prewriting stage, writers normally collect information, connect meanings,

rehearse mentally and on paper, and write parts of a first draft. Often students appear in a writing center with just a general assignment or a vague topic. During this prewriting stage, the astute peer tutor could aid the anxious student by giving him directions in how to discover manageable subjects for composition, how to develop these subjects, and how to convert his ideas into a first draft. Using simple conversation, jot lists, brainstorming sessions, focused and unfocused free writings, the peer tutor could provide tools for the writer to initiate ideas on his own for other future drafts. Bridging the gap between the prewriting and writing stages, the peer tutor could introduce his student to fluency drills, crash-through drafts, and different types of leads or introductions.

Most students appear at writing centers with first drafts in hand. These drafts are often composed hastily without much thought, research, or prewriting. At this stage, Reigstad and McAndrew (1984) suggest that tutors quickly divide their analyses into higher order of concerns (HOC) and lower order of concerns (LOC). The higher order of concerns category includes thesis or focus, appropriate voice or tone, organization, and development. On the other hand, the lower order of concerns encompass problems with sentence structure, punctuation, usage, and spelling. Peer tutors want to stress the importance of writing that is logical,

well developed and interesting, while not overemphasizing the editing techniques of mechanics and spelling.

During the writing stage, peer tutors must be careful not to become trapped into rewriting students' papers but should, instead, help the students to evaluate their higher order of concerns. After having students read their papers out loud, peer tutors can have them reduce their papers to one-sentence summaries. This type of "nutshelling," either in writing or in speech, helps students zero in on their thesis statements. If the student has difficulty summarizing his main point, then he and the tutor can work on focusing his topic.

After paring down the writer's thesis, the tutor should help the student evaluate the voice or tone of his work. The tutor can ask the student to examine his choice of words and sentence structures to see if they are appropriate for the intended audience. Through dialogue, the tutor and writer can also consider whether the language is best suited for the purpose of the paper or the type of assignment. Discussion of types of registers and choices of vocabulary is appropriate during this time of the peer tutoring session.

Next, both the tutor and tutee should investigate the organization and structure of the composition. If the paper is disorganized, the tutor can show the student outlining or networking techniques. Perhaps the tutor could review various

types of organizations or orders of development, such as chronological order, spatial order, inductive order, deductive order, comparison and contrast order, or "in media res" order.

When reviewing the first draft's organization, the tutor may notice parts of the paper which need more development, the fourth highest order of concern. To help fill these gaps, the tutor can suggest that the student try a short focused freewriting on that particular aspect of the paper. Or, the tutor can just simply engage in conversation about that section of the paper in hopes of generating more ideas.

Finally, during the rewriting period, the tutor can begin to address the lower order of concerns. Now the emphasis is no longer on the work as a whole, but rather a line-by-line analysis of the composition's sentence structure, punctuation, usage, and spelling. The tutor is not required to catch every minute mechanical error, but can instead point out problems with sentence structure, variety, and length. If a tutor discovers an error in a particular sentence, he should encourage the writer himself to identify it. Also, the tutor could present mini-lessons in usage, spelling, and punctuation, and could provide worksheets and other resources for the student to practice weak mechanical areas (Reigstad & McAndrew, 1984).

Peer tutoring, therefore, is worthwhile during every part of the writing process, and peer tutors often provide listening posts

for students' personal and academic problems. Research suggests, however, that the effectiveness of peer tutoring depends primarily on the type of training the tutors receive. The evidence is not yet clear which is the best training; however, it seems that peer tutoring training should help tutors to develop both socially and academically (Beck, Hawkins, & Silver, 1978).

Basically there are two types of training programs: those in which tutors are trained in a college course and those in which tutors are trained outside a formal class setting. Perhaps the most emulated training program originated at Brooklyn College in the early 1970s. Formulated by Kenneth Bruffee, this program, entitled "The Brooklyn Plan," is used to train 20 to 30 peer tutors for the college's drop-in writing center.

Prospective peer tutors are recommended by their college English teachers to enroll in an intermediate composition course sponsored by the college's English department. During this 15-week semester course, students meet twice a week for an hour to discuss composition and linguistic theory and to learn about composition teaching techniques. They are required to write four compositions, eight peer criticisms, and two author's replies. In addition, they are expected to tutor three to four hours a week and to keep a journal recording their tutoring experiences.

The major emphasis of the course, however, is peer criticism. The writing assignments are structured so that the student-tutors

will grow in their critical skills. Assignments one and two are short and on subjects of the students' own choosing. When these papers are handed in, two critique sheets are stapled to them and then the papers are passed to two students for evaluation.

The last two papers are much longer and are based on the subjects of writing theory, peer tutoring, and writing centers. Critiques are becoming longer and more complex, too. In the first critique, the students provide an objective rhetorical description of paper one. In the second critique, the students provide an objective rhetorical description, plus evaluative comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the second paper. Students, in the third critique, evaluate each other's theories related to composition, and in the fourth critique, they act as third raters as they comment on one student's composition, followed by an evaluation of the critique stapled on that paper. In other words, they become critics of the critics! By the end of the course, these students have acquired a base of composition theory, have suffered the agony of writing for themselves, have student tutored, and have experienced the two sides of peer criticism (Beck, Hawkins, & Silver, 1978; Dugger, 1976).

At Berkeley, Thom Hawkins and Rondi Gilbert have established a modified, more informal peer tutoring training class. Through a course sponsored by the School of Education, tutors are prepared through seminars, tutor observations,

videotape sessions, tutoring sessions, and handouts. Hawkins and Gilbert believe that training tutors need the same individualized instruction and attention that tutees receive in the writing center. So, the training group and its leaders meet weekly to discuss tutoring issues and problems. The underlying philosophy of this training is that tutors learn by doing, and while they are learning, they also need support, encouragement, and resources (Banniston-Wills, 1984; Hawkins, 1980).

Besides formal classroom training, tutors are often prepared in a myriad of both formal and informal ways. At the University of Cincinnati, for example, writing director Marvin Garrett emphasizes peer criticism and role playing. He has his tutors experience the roles of author, critic, and observer-commentator during the peer tutoring process. Assuming each role, or type of tutor, his students examine various types of writing and attitude problems. He believes that tutors should be introduced to various affective factors such as self-concept, and that tutors should be able to recognize different learning styles.

At New York University, the focus of peer tutoring training is on interpersonal communication, and students are taught the four major roles they assume while tutoring: facilitator, leader, supporter, resister. As the facilitator, the tutor assumes the role of an interested party or audience; whereas, as the supporter, he stands on the sidelines shouting encouragement. If

a tutor acts as a leader, he encourages his tutees to stay on task, while the tutor as a resister, inadvertently or on purpose, blocks communication.

No matter what role the tutor assumes, Lil Branon at New York University asks her tutors to constantly ask themselves these questions:

What do I think the tutee is sensing?

What do I think the tutee is feeling?

What do I think the tutee is thinking?

Why do I think the tutee is here?

What are his expectations?

What is the tutee doing?

What are the tutee's actions?

(cited in Bannister-Wills, 1984, p. 136).

Other tutoring training models include the use of handouts, staff meetings, and informal training sessions. Additionally, most training programs pay close attention to the tutor-tutee role and the best way to set up the tutoring session. A great deal of tutoring research has been concerned with describing general models for conducting writing conferences. For these sessions, Reigstad (1984) describes three protocols: teacher-centered, conversant-conversant, and student-centered. In the teacher-centered model, the tutor acts like a rule-giver or expert,

while in the conversant-conversant model, there is an equal exchange between tutor and student. In the student-centered model, the student controls the conference and answers the prompts of the tutor.

Arbur (1977) encourages use of a social work model which includes seven steps: engagement, problem exploration, problem identification, agreement to work on the problem together, task assignment, solution, and termination. The interview should begin in an atmosphere of courtesy, in which the peer tutor puts the student at ease and introduces himself. The peer tutor should promise confidentiality and should show a willingness to work with the student. Arbur also recommends that the tutor and tutee should sit next to each other at a desk or table, rather than sitting directly across from each other with a piece of furniture separating them. The tutor should assume a non-directive role and should allow the student to tell what problems there are in his composition. But the tutor and tutee should then isolate as specifically as possible, the most severe problem in the paper and should mutually agree to work on the problem together. The tutor, acting as a facilitator, articulates clearly what the student has to do to alleviate his writing problems, and the student, in turn, agrees to the tutor's suggestions. Finally, they will agree to what they both define as realistic expectations for problem-solving

and better writing. The interview is then terminated with the tutor offering positive support and praise.

Duke (1975) proposes that peer tutoring conferences should also revolve around nondirective comments and supportive statements. Cooper (1975, 1977) urges the use of sequential questions in peer tutoring. He believes that the tutor should work on only a few problems at a time and should emphasize three components: rhetoric, intellect, and syntax. Finally, Garrison (1974) structures his writing conference in short three- to five-minute sequences, in which he plays the role of an editor. Basically, his students read their papers aloud and he offers a specific solution for one of their blaring errors.

Like any other technique that promises fast action and quick results, peer tutoring should be scrutinized seriously. A limited number of research studies have been conducted which evaluate the use of peer tutoring on the college level for the teaching of composition. And research indicates that peer tutoring, in general, has great potential. In her Peer and Cross-Age Tutoring in the Schools, Bloom (1976) reports:

> In 90 percent of the studies, tutees made significant progress in school achievement measures--largely in areas of reading and language arts. Thus, it is evident that a great variety are effective in producing significant learning gains by tutees. (pp. 17-18)

Hawkins (1978) admits that it is very difficult to evaluate the effects of peer tutoring on the college level in composition. So far, only grades and retention figures have been used to measure success, and neither tool has proven very accurate because of extraneous, interfering variables. However, user surveys of the students who visited the writing center often show that students value peer tutoring. Presently, there is a need for a tool to be developed to accurately measure students' growth in writing based on their peer tutoring experiences.

During the early 1980s, the Buffalo City School System instigated a supplemental tutorial writing program entitled "The Writing Place" in their high schools. During a summer workshop at the State University of New York, the participants, mostly high school teachers, designed the model for writing centers and developed formative and summative plans of evaluation. Even though this program was aimed at high school populations, these evaluation tools can easily be adapted to the college level writing program. In such an adaptation, formal evaluation of peer tutors and the writing center in general would be based on informal visits by trained observers and on follow-up reports. Using a tutor performance checklist, the trained observer could rate the tutor during a peer tutoring session on the following questions:

1. Did the tutor show a positive response to the student's paper?

2. Did the tutor help the student to understand the assignment?
3. Was there an active interchange of dialogue between tutor and tutee?
4. Did the tutor stress one particular aspect of the student's writing problem?
5. By the end of the conference, was a decision made as to the student's future course of action?

(Reigstad, Williamson, & Matsuhashi, 1980, p. 3)

In a formal summative evaluation, a pretest would be administered before the peer tutoring assistance, and a posttest would be given after a certain time period after the assistance. In the Buffalo program, students were asked to write a pretest essay which was graded first holistically and then analytically in the areas of focus, organization, development, and mechanics. In the analytical rating, graders were asked to note the most obvious or serious error in each essay. During the next eight to twelve weeks, these students worked with a tutor in writing who concentrated particularly on the problem noted on the pretest. After the peer tutoring assistance, students wrote a posttest essay and again raters graded it holistically and analytically. The results of this study indicated that students who were involved in the peer tutoring program wrote generally better

essays and that original problem areas were eliminated or reduced (Reigstad, Williamson, & Matsuhashi, 1980). Perhaps such a model of evaluation could be molded to fit college programs.

So, the area of peer tutoring is one which has proven its reliability and credibility through the ages. It is a method of instruction so diversified and so comprehensive, that it can be used for all groups of people, for all purposes, whether they are organizing protests against roadways, or preparing for doctoral examinations, or even teaching college composition. Peer tutors are relatively inexpensive to hire and easy to train. This small investment, in time and money, is worth so much more than its initial outlay. The real expense in the implementation of peer tutoring is the cost of giving up old ways. Teachers, legislators, parents, and students--the most reluctant of all--must be willing to let go of their tired, trite perceptions of teachers dispensing knowledge and students soaking facts in like soggy, stagnant sponges. Rather, all should stand back and marvel at the miracle of learning which is the peer tutoring process.

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